

Notes From Abroad

World Congress Of Communist Controlled Unions

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FOR MANY YEARS, there could hardly be a more predictable event to report than a Congress of the World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU), the Communist rump of the international trade union organization which reflected the "grand alliance" of the Western Allies with Russia up to 1947. The labor world was accustomed to WFTU congresses as rituals of allegiance to the Russian policy of the moment. The automatic expulsion of the Yugoslav trade unions after the break between Tito and Stalin was a fine example of the blind obedience which was expected—and always obtained—from this hapless organization. Today, the situation has changed somewhat. Recent undercurrents of dissension in the Communist camp are reflected in the "trade union arm" of the world Communist movement, and its debates are beginning to be relevant to problems of the wider labor movement.

The Peiping session of the WFTU General Council in June 1960 was dominated by the violent attack of the Chinese spokesmen on Russian international policy. As opposed to Khrushchev's "peaceful diplomacy," the Chinese demanded a more aggressive foreign policy for the Communist bloc, even at the risk of war. Like the Yugoslav split, this conflict did not arise from problems raised by trade union action, but only reflected a conflict of interests between the ruling classes of two Communist powers. This conflict was still present at the Fifth Congress of the WFTU, held in

Moscow last December, but in a milder form. The main themes of Russian "peaceful diplomacy," interspersed with justifications of the explosion of giant nuclear bombs at Novaya Zemlya and Semipalatinsk, were restated by Khrushchev in person.

Far more important, and more relevant to the natural concerns of the labor movement, was the position of the Italian delegation, representing the Communist and left-Socialist membership of the Italian General Confederation of Labor (CGIL). For the first time in the history of the WFTU after the split, an opposition expressed itself on a platform derived from the real problems of an affiliated organization, rather than from the needs of the ruling class of a Communist state.

THE MAIN ISSUE IN DISPUTE was the new WFTU action program, prepared at headquarters (Prague), along the traditional lines of Communist trade union policy and dominated by the thinking of the Russians and of the French Communist-led unions, the CGT. The program had already come in for heavy criticism in the Socialist *Avanti!* In an article published last October, widely regarded as "courageous" in Italian socialist circles, the daily of the Italian Socialist Party had made the following points:

(1) In its analysis of the world situation, the draft program only distinguishes between a "socialist world" and a "capitalist world" and does not recognize that a policy based on taking sides for one military bloc against another is objectively a threat to peace. The role of "uncommitted nations" and of similar factors is hardly touched upon, except insofar as they are assigned various tasks in the "anti-imperialist" struggle. In this respect the general outlook of the draft pro-

gram is no different from the standard position of all Communist parties: in fact, it shows rather less self-critical insight than many recent CP statements, including statements by Khrushchev himself.

(2) Insofar as the "socialist world" is concerned, the document confines itself to "uncritical praise." It makes no allowances for differences in the specific national situations within the system, and it gives "no element of appreciation concerning the tasks and functions of trade unions and concerning the real problems of the workers in this large part of the world."

(3) Its analysis of the "capitalist world" also remains superficial, and "falls far below the level of similar analyses made by the various national centers and in particular by our own CGIL." The general attacks on monopoly power do not add much to our knowledge of the subject, and "we would have expected a more profound evaluation—if needed a critical evaluation—of the policies required to effectively fight the monopolies." Not enough is said about the tasks of trade unions in advanced capitalist countries; assertions about the "inevitable crisis of capitalism" may be correct in the long run, but the affiliated unions expect some indication as to what they are to do in the short run. For example, what must the workers do to strengthen their own unity against the growing international unity of their employers. Also nothing is said about the new relations between trade unions and the State which, as a result of trade union activity, is no longer the "exclusively" bourgeois State we knew.

(4) Much is said about the international unity of the workers, but only on the level of propaganda appeals. "We do not see how progress can be made here without freeing the trade unions in all countries of subordination to governments, whichever they may be."

(5) Nationalization in capitalist countries is defined as a maneuver of

the monopolies to strengthen their power. "In Italy, this does not adequately reflect the relations between the labor movement and the nationalized industries." Surprisingly enough, the document then goes on to say that the most urgent task of trade unions in capitalist countries is to call for more nationalization!

(6) The document calls on all workers and on their unions to "oppose by utmost resistance the resumption of nuclear testing and to see to it that the manufacture of nuclear weapons be discontinued." The *Avanti!* drily comments: "The original draft of the document goes back to the month of June. We have no knowledge of a similar position being taken by the WFTU after the resumption of nuclear testing by the USSR."

THE DEBATE ON THE DRAFT PROGRAM was then carried further by the intervention of some CGIL functionaries belonging to the Stalinist wing of the Italian Socialist Party (PSI) who rallied to the defense of the draft, then by a rejoinder of a group belonging to the party's "autonomist" wing. Nor was the discussion restricted to the Socialist element in the CGIL. When the Italian delegation arrived in Moscow, it was armed with a counter-program elaborated in the research department of the CGIL, and with no less than 28 amendments to the draft.

The Italian position was stated by Antonio Novella, the Communist president of the CGIL and outgoing president of the WFTU. The proposed action program, he said, could only be a common platform for those already convinced. It does not sufficiently take into account the specific problems of each national and regional situation, particularly that prevailing in Western Europe, where the unions affiliated to the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions exert a profound influence. Directives and slogans must be more flexible. The organization will have to talk about concrete and topical objectives, rather than continuing

the sterile polemic on the 1949 split.

Novella went on to say that "Attacks on the political morality of leaders of other trade union organizations are unnecessary and even damaging. Millions of workers still trust these leaders, and slogans on such themes remain without effect."

The Italian leader also insisted on the necessity for greater trade union independence from political control, and reserved the right not to participate in certain political campaigns: "In our opinion it is not useful that the trade unions should adopt political slogans or diplomatic positions which are not generally shared and which, as experience shows, are subject to revision."

Unusual as such a position may be in a WFTU congress, it was not nearly as unusual as the position of Bruno Di Pol, the Socialist Secretary of the Milan Chamber of Labor. When the Italian delegation finally voted for the action program out of "discipline," in spite of the fact that practically all their amendments were rejected, Di Pol voted against, because he found that "the discrepancy between this text and the positions expressed at the Congress by the Italian delegation was too great." His was the only dissenting voice among 918 delegates, guests and observers, and it caused a moment of panic among the Russian organizers of the Congress, who are in the habit of bringing delegations of workers from factories of the Moscow region to watch such Congresses, and who did not expect to be embarrassed by a living example of dignity and courage.

THE MOTIVES OF THE ITALIAN opposition are mixed: among the Communists, the need to be granted elbow-room for tactical adjustments prevails; among some of the Socialists, there is a genuine desire to restore a measure of rank-and-file control to their movement. But, whatever the motives may be, it is certain to engender far-reaching consequences. The CGIL has

always played a major role in the WFTU, and for good reasons. Theoretically, the membership of the WFTU amounts to 90 million (110 million according to their own estimate). But only 8 million of the total are members of voluntary organizations in countries where a measure of trade union freedom exists. That part of WFTU membership which is in a position to choose freely a union under Communist leadership therefore does not represent more than 9% of the total, and it is essentially confined to the leading trade union centers of France, Italy and Indonesia, and to the second-strongest national center in India. With its 3.5 million members, the Italian CGIL is by far the strongest of the four Communist centers based on voluntary membership, both in absolute numbers and in comparison with the competing centers in the same country. As such, it has always been held up as an example of Communist leadership in the trade union field.

However, since 1947, the workers who follow a Communist leadership in Western Europe do so for "reformist" reasons; that is, they expect their organization to improve their living conditions within the framework of existing society. They choose a Communist union because they trust it to pursue reformist aims more militantly and consistently than the other unions. The leaders of the CGIL know that, under the prevailing circumstances, their organization cannot maintain its position if it cannot give adequate service on "bread and butter" issues. They have been concerned for some time about the increasing isolation and stagnation of their center: most of the important recent agreements (metal and electrical trades, food, chemical industries) have been concluded without the CGIL or against its opposition. Since the leaders of the CGIL are not unintelligent, they fully realize that their problems derive from the obligation to apply mechanically tactics that have nothing to do with the real needs

of the workers concerned. For some time, they have sought to free themselves of this political handicap, and of the obedience symbolized and enforced on the international level by the WFTU.

The leaders of the CGIL are prisoners of revolutionary phraseology, while obliged to follow a reformist practice. On the international level, they have on their hands a cumbersome and useless machinery, which cannot effectively support economic demands within the framework of existing society, and which is incapable of achieving a fundamental transformation of society—in whatever direction—by revolutionary means. To recognize this fact openly, means admitting that the WFTU does not exist to serve the needs of militant trade unionism, but as an auxiliary arm of Russian diplomacy.



THESE PROBLEMS ARE NOT only those of the CGIL: they are shared by every trade union organization in Western Europe under Communist leadership, and particularly by the French Communist-led General Confederation of Workers (CGT). The reasons which impel a French worker to adhere to a CGT union, are no different from those of a rank-and-file member of the CGIL in Italy. The difference lies in the tighter control of the French Communist Party over these unions which is partly due to the absence of

a substantial Socialist tendency, and partly to the continuous existence of a Stalinist apparatus in France for over twenty years. Consequently, the leadership of the CGT remains strongly attached to Stalinist orthodoxy, even at the expense of the immediate interests of the organization. It has so far succeeded in either isolating or crushing any independent tendencies in the organization. This contrast between the French and the Italian position was very much in evidence in Moscow. Certain remarks of the Italian delegates amounted to an indictment of the Thorezian leadership of the CGT which failed to organize any serious resistance to the Algerian war but did successfully organize, for some years, the passivity of the most militant elements of the French working class.

The rigidity of the CGT leadership fails to provide an answer to the crisis of the CGT, which is no less profound than that of the CGIL, and which stems from the same problems. The critical attitude, and the example of relative independence, of the Italian delegation in Moscow, will not fail to disturb the French organization. It might give new life to the officially-approved "loyal" opposition of Le Brun and Rouzaud, and it will probably strengthen the position of the real opposition of Pastre, one of the leaders of the "Movement for United Democratic Trade Unionism" (MS UD) and of other minority elements.

In the immediate future, however, Italians will remain isolated. Unsurprisingly, they met little response for their position in Moscow, and received only weak support from the Polish delegation, from the tiny Communist fraction of the Austrian Federation of Trade Unions, and from the delegates from Cyprus. The Cuban delegation was divided between a "revisionist" fraction which supported the Italians, and the supporters of Stalinist orthodoxy. Partial support on certain issues was given to the CGIL by the Indian delegation, led by S. A. Dange, one of

the leaders of the pro-Russian faction in the Indian C.P. However, Dange, who has to deal with a strong pro-Chinese faction in his own party, has a very small margin for independent maneuver. As it is, his election to the leading bodies of the WFTU was vetoed by the Chinese delegation.

Outside of the Poles, whose special position is determined by that of their own government, there was no reason to assume that the Italian position would be particularly popular with the leaders of the organizations that replace trade unions in the Communist countries; their main concern is certainly not to strengthen the independence of their organizations in order to raise demands on behalf of their membership. As far as the few voluntary organizations are concerned, most of them are solidly controlled by a political apparatus that does not allow for deviations. Novella and his comrades can only be thankful for the geographical accident allowing for their self-expression without fear of immediate retribution.

If the CGIL maintains its position, as it probably will, its isolation within the WFTU is likely to increase. Entirely dominated as it is by the "bloc-vote" of the State organizations of the Communist countries, the WFTU is not an organization that can be reformed or reorganized in such a way as to serve the interests of the mass of workers it claims to represent. Every effort of the CGIL to defend its new position will produce a hardening of the wall of hostility and distrust it already had to face in Moscow.

In the logical order of events, the CGIL would have to choose between two alternatives: either retreat and submission, or disaffiliation at the risk of a possible split. More probably, it will seek to maintain an intermediary position of supporting the WFTU formally while pursuing its own policies. This attitude will resolve nothing, and will generate future difficulties and heresies in the Communist trade union international.

THE ROLE OF the PSI socialists in this situation is interesting to watch. They are at the same time the shield and the alibi of the Communists in the CGIL: The main concern of the Communist Party is not to lose contact with the PSI—its last link with Italian politics. It is prepared to go to great lengths in order not to lose this contact: a recent declaration of the Communists even goes as far as to support the formation of a Christian-Democratic, Social-Democratic and Republican coalition government with PSI support. The necessity of not losing contact with the PSI provides a perfect justification for the Italian Communist Party's policy of relative independence—a necessary evil for some, but a welcome pretext for cutting loose from Moscow for others. On the other hand, the socialists of Nenni's party provide effective protection against reprisals from Moscow against the top leaders of the CGIL.

A Communist has no means of opposing such reprisals short of breaking with the party, but a PSI socialist need not have these compunctions, and Novella's former place on the WFTU Executive Committee is now occupied by Santi, the socialist Secretary-General of the CGIL. (In the presidency of the WFTU, Novella was replaced by Bitossi, a secondary personality in the CGIL.)



The significance of any opposition in the WFTU of course depends on the significance of the organization itself. Increasingly, the leaders of the WFTU have recognized the uselessness of this organization and have assigned it to purely propagandistic purposes. Serious organizing work has been left

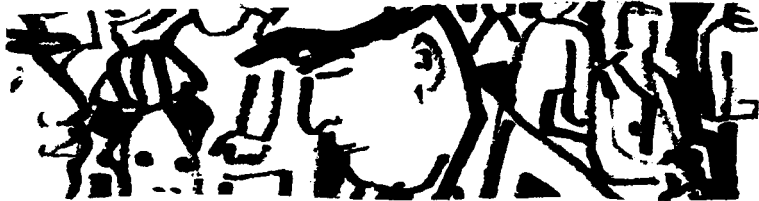
to front organizations and to Communist factions in other trade union bodies: solidarity committees, regional organizations based on a pro-Russian or pro-Chinese brand of neutralism, or organizations confined to a single industry. In Africa, the former WFTU affiliates in the countries of former French West Africa have entered the "All-African Federation of Trade Unions" set up by the TUC's of Guinea and Ghana. In Latin America, the WFTU regional organization—CTAL—has been reduced to a paper organization, while the main effort of the Communist trade unionists is concentrated on creating professional organizations based on the Cuban trade unions.

But even on this level, the WFTU is now stagnating, after some initial success. The Cuban unions, which were for a brief period a pole of attraction for all progressive unions of the continent, and which had established a close alliance with the Venezuelan Confederation of Workers, are now isolated as a result of the obvious control of the Cuban CP over all their operations. In Western Asia, the Iraqi unions, a major conquest of the WFTU, have disaffiliated as a result of Kassim's break with the Iraqi Communist Party, and now seek to revive the International Confederation of Arab Labor Unions. In West Africa, the recent difficulties of the Guinean government with the Communist Party have proved the fragility of the alliance on which the "Pan-African" trade union international is based. In Eastern Asia, the recent decision of the SOHYO, by far the largest of the Japanese trade union centers, to support exclusively the Socialist Party in elections, is a

defeat for the "unity" policy of infiltration associated with the WFTU in that country.

The WFTU has proven itself to be a useless institution from the reformist or the revolutionary point of view, and even its usefulness from the point of view of Stalinist diplomacy is becoming very limited. Will the Italian CGIL, and particularly its socialist tendency, draw the obvious conclusions?

THE MAINSTREAM OF the international labor movement has developed, for some time, outside of the WFTU, and there has not been a single important workers' struggle in the last ten years where the Communist trade union movement has played a leading role. The ICFTU, in spite of obvious weaknesses, now represents 60 million workers which, except for a tiny minority have freely joined organizations of their choice. Independent organizations, without formal international ties, represent other millions. The International Trade Secretariats, who re-group the world's socialist and non-political unions on a "vertical" or industrial basis, are the main bodies actively organizing the unorganized. Affiliation to the WFTU represents an insurmountable handicap for all organizations who wish to establish closer ties with the real international labor movement. Recognition of this fact should lead to the dissolution of the WFTU. But we know that, like the Comintern, the WFTU will not dissolve as long as it has its uses for Russian diplomacy. However, for trade unionists who have a different conception of their role, disaffiliation is an inescapable conclusion.



The New Democratic Party of Canada

THE NEW DEMOCRATIC PARTY of Canada is less than a year old. It had its formal birth last July in Canada's capital city of Ottawa.

Such a significant political event was of course not without its antecedents. Since the turn of the century socialist groups have been active in Canada. Indeed, in our western-most province of British Columbia a full-blown socialist party was developed in the 90's.

Labor, too, had dabbled politically. Sixty years ago a trade union MP was elected to the Canadian parliament and several provincial members of legislatures were elected from industrial areas.

The post World War I period saw a wave of agrarian radicalism sweep across the nation. In Alberta and in Ontario farmers' governments were elected, in the latter case with labor's participation. In the mid-twenties the Progressive Party won sixty seats and held the balance of power in Canada's 245 seat parliament.

The Progressive Party suffered from the lack of any coherent philosophy. Its members of parliament were gradually seduced by Prime Minister Mackenzie King, a wily politician who knew well the threat to his Liberal Party from a growing third force.

By the mid-thirties only a handful of Progressives were left. They were the genuine socialists and were among the true founders of Canada's first democratic socialist party, the Canadian Commonwealth Federation (CCF), born in 1932.

In the meantime, the trade union movement was divided in its political approach. The former Canadian Congress of Labor, counterpart of the American CIO, was politically radical from its inception. In 1942 it endorsed the CCF as labor's political arm. The former Trades and Labor Congress, counterpart of the American Federation of Labor, shunned political action in the tradition of Samuel Gompers. This ambivalence typified the contradictory influence in Canada of the British and American traditions.

Following the merger in 1956 into the Canadian Labor Congress (CLC), trade unionists debated for two years the question of labor's political approach. By 1958 those who favored direct political action had won. Among the key arguments was the very convincing one that the Gompers approach was really meaningless in a nation with a parliamentary system of government. Under cabinet government with rigorous party discipline, rewarding your friends and punishing your enemies makes little sense. For the friends and enemies are not individuals but political parties to the philosophies of which the individual party representative has to adhere.

At its convention in 1958 the CLC decided that the only political friend on which it could depend would be its own political party. Thus, that convention called for "the need of a broadly based people's political movement, which embraces the CCF, the labor movement, farm organizations, professional people and other liberal minded persons interested in basic social reform and reconstruction through our parliamentary system of government." At its convention four months later the CCF responded unanimously to the invitation.

THERE IS NO SPACE HERE to go into the details of the multitude of activities involved during the next three years. New Party Clubs developed across the country as a means of enlisting the participation of non-trade